



Press-Gazette photo by John Robb

Fond memories: Louise Alexander was the third-generation member of her family to run a tavern in the Door County

community of Namur. In the foreground is an old photograph showing her father, Eli Martin (at right), in his tavern.

By Dian Page
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Life after 60

NAMUR — No beer on tap, no more dice, dart or pool games, no more fun gathering. The lights are off and the door is locked at Louise's Bar on Wisconsin 57.

For almost a year, Louise Alexander has had to cope with being out of a business that has been her life.

Louise marks her 81st birthday Sunday, but not at the bar that last year was filled with family and friends for a surprise party. She closed her place last May after legal entanglements brought too many tears.

"People didn't want to see me cry," she says.

"I had hoped to renew my license for two more years, so I could have 60 years in the business."

Her site, which once included a gas station, is one of those caught up in the case against two Northeast Wisconsin men charged with misuse of funds in the Petroleum Environmental Cleanup Fund Program. Her property was excavated because of ground contamination from a gas tank leak many years ago.

"I miss the people. At night, you just don't know what to do with yourself," she says.

She's been passing the time crocheting, and visiting her family. It includes five sons (Robert, Gary, Jack and Terry of Green Bay and Allen in Brussels), 21 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

Born in Brussels at what eventually became known as the

No more tears, no more beers

She lasted nearly 60 years in the Namur bar business

Belgian Inn, Louise was the third generation to operate the bar on the 40-acre site that included a farm.

Her great-grandparents Gasper and Virginia Martin operated the original saloon and dance hall along with an attached general store in the late 1800s, and then her parents, Eli and Ida Martin, took over.

By the time she was 10, her parents had died and she was raised by an aunt and uncle.

Married in 1933, Louise and husband Eugene Alexander bought out her brother's interest in the tavern and it became Gene's Bar in 1934. They operated it until it was sold in 1965 and became the Belgian Inn.

The couple moved south a few miles, purchased the gas station and turned it into a new, smaller Gene's Bar.

After Eugene's death in 1970, the 15-stool establishment became Louise's Bar and she moved into a

new house built behind it.

She says their early years during the Depression were "hard times. When we started, we sold one beer for 5 cents or six beers for 25 cents."

During the war years, her husband ran the bar mornings and worked second shift at Bay Shipbuilding in Sturgeon Bay. As a young mother, Louise took care of her children, worked the bar and milked cows in the barn out back.

Louise has fond memories of her years at the original Gene's. She remembers the wedding celebrations, when ceremonies took place on Tuesday and Wednesday and were followed by breakfast at the bar after the morning ceremony, dinner at the bride's home, and an evening of dancing at Gene's.

Proud of being a "pure-blooded Belgian," Louise likes to tell about the fun involved with the annual Kermis, the Belgian harvest celebration now held on

Sunday of Labor Day weekend.

Years ago they were held on Monday and Tuesday because there was no dancing on Sunday, she says. "After the early Mass, a band led the way to the dance hall where people danced all day and night."

On those occasions, the menu at Gene's included the traditional Belgian goute and tripe, along with the chicken and ham. And there were Louise's Belgian pies. She used to make more than 100 for the Kermis and weddings, she says.

"When I make my Belgian pie, I don't want anyone around," she says. She makes all varieties, though her rice-filled pie is most popular.

If you have someone to suggest for a profile, call Dian Page at 431-8363, or write to her at the Press-Gazette, P.O. Box 19430, Green Bay, Wis. 54307-9430. Include your phone number.